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ABSTRACT

Teachers can create talented writers in their classrooms by designing a course in which students are given the tools and the techniques they need to develop their talents. Writers need (1) an overview of the writing processes, which includes choices about language purposes, register (such as formal, informal, or casual), patterns of organization, methods of development, topic sentence placement, patterns of sentences, and transitions and unifiers; (2) a planning device, such as a planning bank, which allows the writer to keep track of the choices and the resultant text on a single page; and (3) an evaluation guide, which provides specific criteria for evaluating the work in all stages of development. In addition, teachers can create assignments that require writers to accomplish real communication purposes, adopt various roles as writers, and appeal to different levels of audience. They can also ask students to use a number of patterns of communication as whole-work organizers and to write a number of sentence forms to accomplish different purposes within works. (EL)

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CREATING TALENTED WRITERS

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Creating Talented Writers

YOU BECOME WHAT YOU WRITE

Talent. Is it gift or skill, inborn or learned? Are talented writers people with unusual ideas? People who see what others do not? People with style? People who don't make mistakes? People who don't have writer's block?

Whatever answer you choose, the evidence must come from the words that appear on the paper. Unless writing is just recording pre-formed ideas, the talent must lie in the choices of how to shape those ideas into words. The writer can tell us what we've never thought of--or what we've always known--and make either insight seem at once exotic and familiar.

Talent lies in mastery of technique, in individual technical competencies and in the choices made from among them to craft an individual writing. The talented writer can:

- adopt roles as a writer (advocate, innocent)
- address different audiences (readers of the TIMES, younger students) with appropriate diction and register
- accomplish many communication purposes (direct the behavior of others, create a fantasy world)
- write a number of whole-work forms (problem-solution, narrative, topic-aspect)
- use varied methods of development (building an image, inductive reasoning)
- write many sentence styles (If...then, deliberate fragment)

• use transitions effectively (bridges, parallel structure, climactic sentences)

• most important of all, the talented writer can make these stylistic choices. Given a writing situation, the talented writer can take it from there. Given no specific situation, the talented writer can create one and then take it from there. The talented writer wants a teacher to be an editor and not a crutch.

Where do these people come from--those who would have us be thoughtful readers instead of painstaking "correctors" of their work? You can create them in your classroom.

You can create them because thinking and writing are not separable processes. We do not juggle thoughts until, like puzzle pieces, they fall into the right pattern and can then be recorded in writing. Writing doesn't happen after thinking; writing is thinking.

You become what you write. If the writer creates the reader through the text, then the writer--his own first reader--creates himself as he writes: as persona, as thinker, as technician. Writer response precedes reader response.

Then the teacher of writing, through choice of assignments and instruction, determines not only what, but also who will be created. Writers become what you ask them to write. If you want to work with talented writers, you must design a course which shows individual writing techniques and the relationships among them, starting with the relationships.

This can't be done with an "invisible book," with unwritten lists of techniques and relationships and standards. Without a written list of techniques, the writer can never be independent of you and can never make conscious decisions about the writing. Beyond the list, the writer needs a design tool which will help in the planning, revising and editing of the work. Finally, the writer needs a written list of evaluation criteria to be able to evaluate others' work and his own.

When you and your writers have an overview of the writer's choices, a design tool for writing, and a guide for evaluation, you can speak a common language in order to:

- say what doesn't work in a writing,
- say why it doesn't work, and
- suggest different forms or approaches or techniques that might make it work.

You can do all three in specific terms that are mutually understood. Students can work in writing groups to make these judgments for each other. Ultimately, writers will do all three for themselves (as much as writers ever can) by using the overview, the planning device, and the evaluation guide.

THE OVERVIEW

The overview of writing processes (shown.....) is a menu for writers. It reads from left to right, from choices about purpose and audience to choices about sentences and unifiers, because I think the writer has to define audience and purpose before any other choices can be made. The overview moves from purpose and audience to patterns of organization,

OVERVIEW OF WRITING PROCESSES

Language Purposes	Register	Patterns of Organization	Methods of Development	T Sentence Placement	Patterns of Sentences	Transitions & Unifiers
to control: to get things done to get along with others to direct the behavior of others to learn: to learn about oneself to learn about the world around us to create: to create one's own fantasy world to create statements about the real world	frozen formal informal casual intimate	problem-solution opinion-reason thesis-proof statement-support how-to topic-aspect question-answer news narrative dramatic poetic	defining comparing & contrasting creating metaphor & analogy using allusion establishing an order describing building an image using propaganda dividing & classifying analyzing synthesizing drawing inductive conclusions drawing deductive conclusions	first middle last delayed-completion implied	emphasis: short cuts focusers repetitions reversals relationships: A is B A and B A or B A like B A although B A because B If A, then B A before B A wherever B combinations: parallel structure series modifiers	structure or signal words repetitions hook-and-eye links bridges parallel structure climactic sentences

insert 1: overview

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whole-work organizers that show the logical relationships among the parts of a work. This writing menu features main courses. Next come the parts within the overall framework established by the organizing pattern: methods of development, placement of topic sentences, sentence patterns, and transitions and unifiers.

Without an audience, purpose, and pattern of thinking or organization, the rest of these become meaningless choices. How might a writer respond to this assignment: "Compare and contrast apples and oranges"?

- role as writer: As whom? a nutritionist? an advertiser of orange juice? a writer of recipes? a pesticide manufacturer? a thrower of rotten fruit at passing trucks?
- audience: For whom? consumers? botany students? greengrocers? parents? first-graders? homeowners with fruit trees?
- purpose: For what? to emphasize differences? to show similarities? to give a balanced view? to show how any similarity contains a difference? to show that one is bigger, better, cheaper, harder, or hardier than the other?

Without an audience, purpose, role as a writer, and a means of organizing the whole work, comparing and contrasting is a meaningless (if not hopeless) task. Faced with such an assignment, the writer becomes like the telephone caller who reaches a recording machine instead of a person, and then forgets his name, his purpose, and his ability to use the language.

This overview is not descriptive or prescriptive; it does not say what writing is or what choices should be made in any situation. Instead, the overview is elective: it lists some choices the writer can make. It does point out, however, that there are choices to be made, and that the choices should be made consciously while planning, revising, and evaluating the work.

THE PLANNING BLANK

After a list of choices, the next tool needed is a device that allows the writer to keep track of the choices and the resultant text--all on a single page.

The planning blank (shown.....) allows the writer to see--during planning, writing, and revising--the choices made and the choices to be made. The heading establishes the rhetorical situation of the writing task. In the case of a poor assignment which has no real rhetorical situation ("Write a paper on Africa"), the heading reminds the writer to establish one ("As an advisor to the leader of a newly independent African nation, suggest solution strategies for what you define as the two or three most important problems facing your new nation").

Each "paragraph" box on the planning blank represents not one paragraph, but one part of the pattern. Each pattern part could require one sentence or dozens of paragraphs to develop. The size and scope of the work have no impact on the pattern or form used to organize the whole. Extent of development and methods of development are further choices of

Writer literature student Purpose get good grade
Audience literature teacher Register formal
Topic form and purpose Pattern thesis-proof

Pattern part: Thesis Method of Development: Analogy TS placement & structure: ~~middle~~ first	The 4-part structure of Gulliver's Travels is like a hall of mirrors. As the reader proceeds through the work, encountering one distorted image after another, his first reaction is to laugh at shorter, fatter, taller, thinner, twisted images of himself. The laughter, however, is soon replaced by doubt--not only of the images, but of the originals, as well.
Pattern part: Proof #1 Method of Development: Comp/Contrast? TS placement & structure: middle	~~In the 1st voyage Gulliver~~ By the beginning of the 4th voyage, the reader has seen smaller, bigger, and stranger societies than G's, but all through G's eyes. These earlier picture remain with the reader but are reshaped by the events of the 4th voyage.
	bridge relating 4th to earlier voyages?
Pattern part: Proof #2 Method of Development: TS placement & structure:	change in perspective from 1st to 2nd voyage
Pattern part: Proof #3 Method of Development: TS placement & structure:	development of Yahoo-like creatures vs. dev. H-like creatures
Pattern part: Significance Method of Development: TS placement & structure:	Parallel structure? (insert 2: PLANNING BLANK)

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the writer, and the additional spaces in the left-hand margin allow these and other choices to be written as they are made, and rewritten as they are modified.

The partially completed planning blank shows a writer in the middle of planning and writing and editing a response to this assignment in a literature course: "Discuss the structure of Gulliver's Travels."

The writer has given the topic some definition, completed the heading, and begun to write the first two major sections of the paper, the thesis and the first proof. Method of development and placement of the topic sentence (the controlling sentence for the section) have also been chosen for these two pattern parts. In other places on the blank, the writer has identified possible content and techniques to be used.

This is a work in progress. It is a writing being developed, not a writing being recorded. Editing is already taking place. In the first proof, the writer has dropped the usual chronological approach and has decided to begin instead with the culminating voyage, and then to work back to earlier events.

Using this device, the writer can work on any pattern part by noting the content or techniques to be used directly in the "paragraph" box for that part. Transitions can be noted between or within the appropriate boxes. For longer, more detailed works, more planning blanks can be added.

The writer won't get lost in the details of the work, and can always be aware of the choices made and the choices to be made.

Will every word of the finished product appear on a completed planning blank? Probably not. Another important revision can be made in moving from a completed planning blank to a finished product: The writer, now satisfied with the overall design and the content of the work, can concentrate on sentence structure and wording. The writer can think about structure as a function of purpose. Instead of seeing the sentence "None of them knew the color of the sky" as a simple sentence, the writer will see it as an attention-getter--that is its purpose.

By having to attend to only a few aspects of style during this final step, the writer is free to think about sentence variety, sentence purpose, and finding the exact word--at a time when most student writers are happy to find enough words.

With these tools, writers learn to count ideas, not words. They learn to get rid of such products of verbal idling as this standard but deadly opening: "In (name of work), a (genre), the author, (name of author), is trying to show...."

THE EVALUATION GUIDE

What else does a writer need? Besides a list of choices and a planning device, the writer needs specific criteria

EVALUATION GUIDE

Area	Yes	No	Criteria or Standards
Content			1. There is a clear main idea or generalization. 2. There are enough supporting ideas to develop the main idea. 3. The ideas are relevant and well-chosen. 4. The ideas do not contradict one another. 5. The ideas are consistent with knowledge of the outside world.
Organization			1. The overall pattern of organization is clear and effective (specify one). 2. Methods of development are varied and appropriate for topic and audience (specify at least three methods). 3. Topic sentence placement is varied (specify at least three placements). 4. Transition is effective (specify at least four transitional devices). 5. Sentence structure is varied and effective (specify at least five sentence patterns).
Rhetorical Situation (speaker and audience)			1. The writer's role is clear and consistent. 2. There is a clear sense of audience (as shown by word choice, tone, etc.). 3. The register (level of formality) is appropriate for the speaker, audience, topic, and situation. 4. Tone and distance are appropriate for the speaker, audience, topic, and situation.
Everything Else			1. Punctuation is correct and effective. 2. Rules of usage are followed. 3. Rules for spelling and mechanics are followed.
General effectiveness in accomplishing purpose (remarks):			

(insert 3: EVALUATION GUIDE)

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for evaluating the work in all stages of development, from the first thought to the last punctuation mark. Revising isn't something that happens after writing, just as writing isn't something that happens after thinking. "Prewriting" is a misleading term; "planning" makes more sense as a word to describe the continuing process.

Consider that a student writing for a teacher--and many assignments, even "realistic" ones, are seen by no one else--is in a nobody-to-nobody rhetorical situation. It is an admittedly phony setup in which a teacher may well be evaluating the supposed effect on a supposed audience by a supposed writer.

Based on what standards? If we can't make all assignments real and then evaluate them on the basis of their actual effects, the least we can do is to announce to writers the standards we're using to evaluate by supposition. The evaluation guide (shown.....) gives the writer an agreed-upon list of standards for evaluation, an answer key or rubric or model answer. If the teacher allows the writer to use the same standards to plan and to revise the work that will actually be used to evaluate the work, the writer can use, and eventually internalize, the "right" criteria, the criteria of good writing.

For us as teachers, there is no overview of the teaching processes which produce good writing from students. There is no planning blank to help us to create a course for talented writers (or any other kind). There is no evaluation guide to tell us--from the beginning--what standards will be used to evaluate our teaching of writing.

The rudiments of all three tools exist in various tests, evaluation criteria, outlines, curricula, and programs, but rudiments are not enough. As a writer needs to use overview and planning blank and evaluation guide at the same time to work efficiently, so must the teacher have all three to be able to teach this type of writing. If you want to develop the talents in your writers, you may wish to try using these tools.

I don't know if this is THE WAY to teach writing, but I think it is a way that works. Using these tools, the least able 9th-graders have written acceptable solutions (above 65 by holistic scoring) to writing problems on the 11th-grade Regents Competency Test in Writing.

Responses by 11th-graders take on sharpness when each response is planned with an appropriate form:

the complaint letter.....problem-solution pattern

the report.....topic-aspect pattern

the composition.....opinion-reason pattern

Average writers in grades 10-12 can easily learn to use 6-7 organizing patterns, 7-8 methods of development, 8-10 sentence patterns, 3-4 topic sentence placements, and 3-4 types of transitions and unifiers.

And "talented" writers? It's amazing how many there are when they have the right tools. Talented writers can adapt existing forms to create new ones. They can create combinations that their teachers never thought of. They can find new and effective ways to achieve the assigned or chosen communication purposes.

CREATE TALENTED WRITERS

If you want to work with talented writers, create them in your classroom by giving them the tools and the techniques they need to develop their talents. Make visible your overview of writing, your planning device, and your standards of evaluation.

Create assignments which require writers to accomplish real communication purposes, to adopt various roles as writers, and to appeal to different levels of audience. Writers will learn to "listen" to themselves. They will learn to suit forms to purposes and rhetorical situations.

Ask students to use a number of patterns of communication as whole-work organizers. Ask them to use different methods of development and to attend to the placement of topic sentences at the same time: Should the topic sentence for a pattern part developed with an analogy be placed first, so that the rest of the sentences can extend the relationships the first sentence establishes?

By learning to use methods of development within whole-work organizers, writers will learn how to relate the parts to the whole. They will be able to use those little flashes of brilliance to light up whole works.

Ask them to write a number of sentence forms to accomplish different purposes within works. Ask them to write sentences to focus attention, to create a false lead, to show various relationships, to combine elements.

Writers will learn to choose sentence forms that will accomplish their purposes. If unifying the work is the purpose,

will learn to use parallel structure as a beginning for the end, as the first sentence of a conclusion or of a cumulative summary. Writers will be able to eliminate wholesale revision by good planning.

Give them the tools and teach them the techniques. Make them apprentices, not auditors. Ask them to write.

There must be something left for the teacher to do while student writers are working alone or in writing groups to plan, revise, and evaluate their writing. There is. Work on developing more writing assignments. Work on your own writing. Meet with students to compare your evaluation with their evaluations of their writings. Walk around and listen to decisions being made. You'll hear writers and editors debating everything from fine points of style to "Is this what she wants?"

Be the helpful editor, but let the writers make the choices. Let them be, however great or small their individual talents, not just students, but writers.